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Facing Asymmetry: Nordic Intellectuals and Center–Periphery Dynamics

Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang

Introduction

In the 1880s Hjalmar Neiglick, a promising young philosopher in Finland, claimed that the only thing worse than the geographical position of his country was its place on the European cultural map.[1] Neiglick was an admirer of Georg Brandes, the nationally controversial and internationally renowned Danish intellectual. For Neiglick as well as Brandes, national romanticism in science, literature, and art stood in the way of progress and transnational modernity. Arguing that the small nations of Europe could not allow themselves to be self-absorbed, both Neiglick and Brandes wanted to reverse the perspective by stressing the need to import international modernity in order to "catch up."

Cultural asymmetries and center–periphery dynamics played crucial roles in the lives and careers of small-country intellectuals in the international system of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-states. The cultural space of Neiglick's Finland, and to a lesser extent Brandes's Denmark, was characterized by a peripheral self-understanding vis-à-vis the centers of continental Europe. There was a strongly held assumption that the "real" discussions were taking place elsewhere, and that any ambitious scholar or writer needed to approach the cultural centers in order to develop professionally. But economic, social, and cultural obstacles restrained access to the core and the possibility of having a significant impact on debates carried on in the centers. More often, the purpose of approaching the centers was to gain cultural capital that could be used back home. Such terms as "Europe," "Paris," "Vienna," or "London" thus became discursive markers by which the cosmopolitan avant-gardes fashioned themselves as local representatives of the core's modernity. This core was understood both spatially and temporally, not only as a place but also as an expression of advanced modernity.

The examples discussed in this article are drawn from the experiences of intellectuals from Scandinavia, or the so-called Nordic countries, including Finland. This region provides important

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[1] Letter from Neiglick to the writer K. A. Tavaststjerna, cited by Gunnar Castrén in *Nya Argus*, February 16, 1938.

examples of the asymmetries in European intellectual space: “Norden” has always been on the geographical margins of Europe, but has never been completely dominated by solely one center. Both the predominant German cast of academia until the early twentieth century and the strong Anglo-American influence post-1945 were always mitigated by German, Anglo-American, French, and Russian influences.[2] Moreover, the Nordic region, which consists of five (or, prior to 1944, four) independent countries, is also interesting by virtue of its internal asymmetries, with the capitals of the old states of Denmark and Sweden competing for the role of regional center, and the young nations Finland and Norway (independent in 1917 and 1905, respectively) serving as peripheries of the periphery.

We focus particularly on internationally oriented scholars often cultivating an uneasy relationship to nationalism in politics, culture, and science. International networks played a large role for nationalists and internationalists alike, but while the latter emphasized the need to strengthen the integrity and independence of the national culture, the former underlined the dependency of the peripheries on the cultural centers of Europe and positioned themselves accordingly as cosmopolitan cultural modernizers in their local contexts. Many of them belonged to a progressive movement of liberal or socialist intellectuals (*kulturradikaler*), and in Finland, where the intellectual field was split into Finnish- and Swedish-language factions, some prominent figures such as Neiglick provocatively adopted an internationalist position against the dominant Finnish nationalism, or defended the co-existence of parallel linguistic nationalisms. We will also draw upon examples from a second generation of positivist intellectuals who, after roughly the 1930s, were less involved in debates over nationality and more flexible in combining intellectual internationalism and patriotism.

The Nordic intellectuals examined in this chapter conceptualized asymmetry in different ways. Elements of spatiality (centers–peripheries), temporality (modernity vs. backwardness), and ideology (cosmopolitanism vs. nationalism, progressivism vs. conservatism) were drawn upon to different degrees and often associated with one another. Temporally, we focus on the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, a period when nationality, internationality, and cosmopolitanism were intensively debated all over Europe. The general argument will, however, be familiar to anyone who has been engaged in the intellectual history of a small or peripheral culture, and will surely remain relevant even in the increasingly complex context of globalization.

[2] For Finland, see Matti Klinge, *A European University: The University of Helsinki 1640–2010*, trans. Anthony Landon and Malcolm Hicks (Helsinki: Otava, 2010); and Juhani Paasivirta, *Finland and Europe: International Crises in the Period of Autonomy 1808–1914*, trans. Anthony F. Upton and Sirkka R. Upton (London: Hurst, 1981). For Norway, see Gunnar Skirbekk, introduction to Fjelland et al., *Philosophy beyond Borders: An Anthology of Norwegian Philosophy* (Bergen: SVT Press, 1997), 9–18.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first discusses cultural asymmetry and the limits of reciprocity, as well as the strategies developed by peripheral intellectuals to deal with this asymmetry. The second part calls attention to the multiple —local, national, and international— frames and strategies of small-country intellectuals, and particularly to the extent to which international trajectories are locally determined. The implications of multiple frames and positioning strategies are explored in the final section, where we consider the advantages and disadvantages of the peripheral position and the role of voices from the margins in international or global intellectual discussions.

I. Asymmetrical Relations

Degrees of Reciprocity

In the nineteenth century and beyond, intellectual fields in Europe were clearly nationally determined, in so far as national institutions, audiences, and publication forums were decisive for anyone pursuing a career in the arts or sciences.[3] But it is equally true that transnational references and comparisons constituted an inseparable part of each national space. Moreover, intellectual life revolved around a tension between the notion that all national cultures and languages were equal and the inevitable inequality resulting from disparities of prestige and power. Representatives of young nations such as Finland and Norway struggled for recognition abroad in a process where cultural import and export played a major role. As international acknowledgment of the national culture was often the ultimate aim, this exchange, as well as every other aspect of intellectual life, became part of the national project itself.

While many intellectuals gladly acknowledged the national paradigm, finding it an honor to represent their nation at international congresses or world exhibitions, those who chafed under the strong national imperative dealt with internationality differently. By forming alliances with intellectuals abroad, taking detours via foreign contexts, and adopting cosmopolitan positions in local debates, they challenged dominant positions within their native intellectual fields. In the 1880s the Swedish writer August Strindberg set out to conquer Paris in order to have his revenge on the

[3] Gisèle Sapiro, ed., *L'Espace intellectuel en Europe, XIXe–XXIe siècles: de la formation des Etats-nations à la mondialisation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), especially the introduction by Sapiro and the reprinted article by Bourdieu.

cultural elites in Stockholm.[4] Similarly, having been denied a position at the University of Copenhagen, Georg Brandes—one of Nietzsche's "good Europeans"—spent a significant part of his life in Germany and traveling across Europe; he saw this as the most effective way to influence Danish cultural politics while remaining part of the *contre-pouvoir*.[5] And Henrik Ibsen, the icon of Scandinavian modernism, spent a total of 27 years abroad, in Italy and Germany, mounting an aesthetic revolution from a distance.[6] Ibsen, Strindberg, and Brandes—and, beyond the Scandinavian context, writers such as Kafka, Joyce, and Borges—are perhaps the best known, but there are numerous examples of how the interplay between the local and the transnational has been used as a means to achieve a more encompassing perspective on national questions. Such voluntary exiles also served to underline the detached position sought by those intellectuals who opposed the predominant ethical-political roles of nineteenth-century European intellectuals.[7]

The approaches that have emerged from recent attempts to overcome "methodological nationalism" in the humanities and social sciences have explicitly been developed as alternatives not only to narrowly national perspectives, but also to the comparative methodologies and earlier theories of cultural exchange between nation-states. According to a much-quoted article by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, the focus on comparisons or transfers risks merely reinforcing national differences, thus cementing "the principle of the Olympic Games," according to which everyone must represent one, and only one, nation.[8] Indeed, a key insight of transnational history and the study of cultural transfers is the emphasis on active selection and appropriation at the receiving end, which has resulted in examinations of the strategies of individual actors who are connected to each other in a complex web of relations cutting across national borders, and who make use of foreign ideas according to their own particular and often highly local concerns.

At the same time, the long-standing image of an egalitarian and borderless intellectual republic tends to overshadow any consideration of particular and often highly local concerns. Pierre Bourdieu is certainly correct in pointing out that intellectual life is too often assumed to be somehow spontaneously international.[9] The history of intellectual exchanges across and beyond

[4] For a dissertation on this topic, see Stellan Ahlström, *Strindbergs erövring av Paris: Strindberg och Frankrike 1884–1895* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956).
[5] See Jørgen Knudsen, *GB: en Georg Brandes-biografi* (København: Gyldendal, 2008); "Georg Brandes e l'Europa" I–II, *Studi Nordici*, vols. 9 and 10 (2004.)
[6] See the chapter by Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem in this book.
[7] For Finland, see Risto Alapuro, "De intellektuella, staten och nationen," *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 72 (1987): 457–79.
[8] Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: *Histoire croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 33–35. See also Paul Forman, "Scientific Internationalism and the Weimar Physicists," *Isis* 64, no. 2 (1973). We borrow the Olympic Games simile from Henrik Stenius.
[9] E.g., Pierre Bourdieu, "Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 145 (2002): 3–8.

Europe is a history of misunderstandings and reappropriations between very different transmitting and receiving contexts within a configuration of unevenly distributed symbolic capital. From the viewpoint of the periphery, the study of the social and cultural conditions of transnationality calls attention to the need to consider both entanglement and its limits. As long as we are concerned with the interaction between major European cultural and linguistic spheres, such as those in France, Germany, and England, it may well make sense to emphasize reciprocity, mutuality, and cross-fertilization. But as the asymmetry between the interacting parties increases, the degree of reciprocity decreases. This point may be rather obvious, but it needs to be emphasized in the light of the recent focus on hybridity in cultural history.[10] In fact, in the majority of cultural transfers, the degree of reciprocity is probably very small.[11] Such transfers, being locally determined, are essentially asymmetrical, and the appropriation or rejection of foreign imports is conditioned by specific local concerns.[12]

Centers and Peripheries

The labels "center" and "periphery" tend to provoke strong emotions of sympathy or antipathy. Center–periphery models are certainly problematic when they imply that the centers are active and the peripheries passive. The notion of an innovative center spreading modernity to the imitating peripheries is obviously a gross misconception. But while recognizing that innovation takes place in centers as well as peripheries, it may well be useful to recall other aspects of the center–periphery dichotomy in order to reflect upon the consequences of cultural hierarchies. "Periphery" should be understood as a dynamic rather than as a static term; it changes gradually and constantly in relation to multiple centers whose significance varies over time and space.

Studies in this direction have recently been attempted, for example, in accounts of "world literature" inspired by world-systems theory and undertaken by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova, as well as in postcolonial studies. Moretti has called attention to world literature in relation to the grossly uneven capitalist world system, a fundamentally unequal cultural space divided into centers, peripheries, and semi-peripheries, where the international circulation of ideas and literatures is anything but reciprocal.[13] Subaltern and postcolonial studies, in turn, have

[10] Summarized in Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
[11] Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Culture Research* (Tel Aviv: Unit of Culture Research, Tel Aviv University, 2010 [2005]), 58.
[12] Blaise Wilfert, "Cosmopolis et l'homme invisibile: Les importateurs de littérature étrangère en France, 1885–1914," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 144 (2002): 33–46.
[13] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (January–February 2000) and "More Conjectures," *New Left Review* 20 (March–April 2003); Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (1999;

emphasized the structural inequality between Western and non-Western societies, and have called simple diffusion models of cultural transfer into question by stressing the relevance of the periphery for the core, and by drawing attention to the problems involved in using Western concepts and theory to describe subaltern realities.[14]

Even if there is clearly a correlation between cultural, political, and economic asymmetry, it is important to recognize, with Gramsci and Bourdieu among others, the relative autonomy of the cultural field. Pascale Casanova refers to Fernand Braudel's discussion of cultural versus economic centers in the early modern period, with Venice and Amsterdam at the core of commercial life, and Florence, Rome, and Madrid as the leading cultural capitals.[15] Moreover, each field of culture, be it science, literature, art, or their subfields, has its own center–periphery relations. Competing philosophical schools may have their specific centers, such as Cambridge for the linguistically oriented analytical philosophers and Frankfurt for the critical theorists. Center–periphery should therefore be treated as a gradual and multilevel distinction, rather than as a rigid dichotomy.

Also, a center often stands in a peripheral relation to another center. As a cultural region, the Nordic countries have had their own internal center–periphery dynamics, with Copenhagen serving as a regional center where European ideas were filtered and disseminated further to the more remote parts of the region. In 1936 logical positivism was introduced to a larger Nordic academic public through the Second International Congress for the Unity of Science, which took place in Copenhagen. This congress was a meeting point between the main international figures of the logical positivist movement and philosophers from all over the Nordic countries.[16] Similarly, it was not a coincidence that the internationally renowned mediators of nineteenth-century Nordic philosophy and literature—Harald Høffding and Brandes—were both from Copenhagen. The city also attracted intellectuals from the other Nordic countries, for some of whom the cultural institutions and intellectual networks of Copenhagen functioned instrumentally as a stepping-stone on the way to the "real" centers of Europe. Minna Canth, the Finnish translator of the first volume of Georg Brandes's scholarly bestseller *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* (Danish orig. 1872) humorously implied in a letter from the 1880s that while the translation was a means for

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Paris: Seuil, 2008) and Casanova, ed., *Des littératures combatives: L'internationale des nationalismes littéraires* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 2011).

[14] Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[15] Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, 29.

[16] See Jan Faye, "Niels Bohr and the Vienna Circle" and Johan Strang, "*Theoria* and Logical Empiricism: On the Tensions between the National and the International in Philosophy," in *The Vienna Circle and the Nordic Countries: Networks and Transformations of Logical Empiricism*, ed. Juha Manninen and Friedrich Stadler (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

her to advance her career, the plan was to move beyond Copenhagen: "When I reach higher, to Taine, Renan and Spencer, then I can say 'so long' to Brandes."[17]

It is one of the main characteristics of center–periphery dichotomies that spatial, mental, and temporal dimensions tend to become entangled. Spatial terms such as "Europe," "France," "Vienna," or "London" merge with temporal ones such as "world-leading," "modern," or "progressive," thus exemplifying what Reinhart Koselleck has conceptualized in terms of "the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous."[18] This feature is particularly strong in the small nations, where intellectuals are predisposed to think that modernity exists elsewhere. The rhetoric of "following," "catching up," and "modernizing" can typically be found flourishing among the various avant-gardes of the peripheries, for whom fashioning oneself as a representative of advanced modernity in the cultural capitals of Europe was a common strategy. Neiglick conceived of this movement as travel in both time and space, and for him, the given standard towards which his native Finland was moving was French modernity. Within this configuration, Neiglick envisioned himself as an accelerator of progress, in accordance with a certain model of development that would enable the Finnish periphery to catch up with the center, or at least to stay ahead of other competing peripheries.[19] Similar positions were taken by the Brandesian radicals at the turn of the century as well as by Nordic analytic philosophers in the next generation.

More often than not, the temporal center–periphery rhetoric was aimed at local rivals who were outmaneuvered as old-fashioned and outdated. As Neiglick before him, the Finnish logical-positivist philosopher Eino Kaila in the 1920s and 1930s effectively used his international networks to further his own position in Helsinki. According to Kaila, it was only through his connections to the Vienna Circle that Finnish philosophy could stay on a par with the latest achievements in European science.[20] This conflation of temporal progress with spatial centrality was even more apparent when he was asked to referee professorial appointments in neighboring countries. Both in Sweden and in Norway, Kaila described philosophers interested in logical positivism as "ultra-modern" and "more advanced" than their "backward" and "old-fashioned" rivals.[21]

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[17] Cited in Annamari Sarajas, *Viimeiset romantikot: Kirjallisuuden aatteiden vaihtelua 1880–luvun jälkeen* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1962), 8.
[18] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 237–39. The same idea also figures in Marxist philosophy, for example in the writings of Ernst Bloch.
[19] Stefan Nygård, "Kulturradikal internationalism som nationell strategi," *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier* 86 (2011): 61–90.
[20] Eino Kaila, "Vastine J E Salomaalle" (1939) in *Valitut teokset I* (Helsinki: Otava, 1990), 527–45; Kaila, "Suomalainen tiede voi tasavertaisena kilpailla maailman korkeimpien saavutusten kanssa," *Uusi Suomi*, June 20, 1934. See Johan Strang, "The Rhetoric of Analytic Philosophy: The Making of the Analytic Hegemony in Swedish Philosophy", *Redescriptions* 16 (2013): 11–38, here 31.
[21] See Johan Strang, "History, Transfer, Politics: Five Studies on the Legacy of Uppsala Philosophy" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2010), 61–62.

II. Modernity Is Elsewhere

The Primacy of the Local

There is no escaping the fact that intellectual debates in self-consciously peripheral regions frequently mirrored debates in the core. They were often conducted by ambassadors of different "European" movements, with similar arguments and ideas, either with or without explicit references to leading intellectuals in France, Germany, or the Anglo-American world. Thus, the debate on philosophy and science between Durkheim and Bergson in France during the 1910s and 1920s was mirrored by a debate between the philosophers Rolf Lagerborg and Hans Ruin in Finland, where it was viewed through the prism of Finland's German-oriented intellectual environment.[22]

Similarly, peripheral environments can be venues for debates among competing interpretations of the same intellectual movement. In such exchanges, those who are the first to introduce a new movement have a competitive advantage, which enables them to colonize the movement for themselves. A contender can then challenge an established "ambassador" by claiming to have a "more correct" interpretation, perhaps by referring to a more recent encounter with the intellectual authority in question.

Against such a background, the intellectual histories of the peripheries have often been conceived of as a history of *reception*. The leading intellectual movements or philosophers in the European core have served as the given model of interpretation, while the context and intentions of peripheral actors have tended to be overlooked. However, the recent emphasis on reappropriation and cultural transfers in intellectual history has shifted attention beyond a static conception of dominant centers and receiving peripheries. As a result of an increasing interest in exploring the role of transfer agents and their intentions, deviations are more often described in terms of appropriations or "re-descriptions" of foreign ideas in a new environment.[23] This activity takes place within the framework of an international circulation of ideas and cultural products, where the dynamics of each national or urban space at a specific point in time determine the degree of receptiveness or non-receptiveness to particular ideas.

[22] Stefan Nygård, *Henri Bergson i Finland: Reception, rekontextualisering och politisering* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2011).
[23] On the notion of "rhetorical re-descriptions," see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 128–80.

At the receiving end, the original context and the debates from which ideas emerge are left behind, making way for "misunderstandings" and variations in the interpretation of ideas in different contexts.[24] There is always some element of "interest" involved on the part of the cultural importers, who may be looking for support for their position at home by seeking recognition abroad, or by forming alliances with foreign intellectuals. The main features of this process are clear: being associated with the cultural capitals of Europe or the specific centers of the different subfields of cultural and scientific life, or simply mobilizing internationally circulating ideas, constituted important aspects of local positioning strategies. At times, according to the culture researcher Itamar Even-Zohar, "the desire for change may promote a favorable attitude towards occurrences in another society, with the help of which, if transferred, one can hope to get away from an undesired situation."[25]

Taking a detour abroad thus provides a means to introduce change at home. Just as the notion of "catching up" entails the idea of a more advanced center as the source of diffusion of social and cultural innovations, individuals and groups have strived to become associated with a center. Internationally oriented avant-gardes, positioning themselves as the representatives of European modernity in the periphery, were in fact prone to accentuate the marginal position of their native countries and to contrast national heteronomy with international autonomy. In the introduction to *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, Brandes describes the uneven spread of literary modernity in Europe, arguing that the Denmark of his time was "as usual" forty years behind "Europe." Its literature, he writes, is like a small chapel in a large church; it has an altar but the main altar is elsewhere.[26]

It was important for scholarly and artistic avant-gardes, for whom being modern has meant being international and even vice versa, to look for support beyond the national context. To the extent that national recognition was associated with conservatism, the avant-gardes were inclined to present themselves as misunderstood at home and recognized abroad.[27] However, even the most cosmopolitan and internationally successful among late nineteenth-century Scandinavian writers did not break completely from their native intellectual fields. More often than not, they remained oriented toward Scandinavian audiences and local problems, thus illustrating the local rootedness of their cosmopolitanism.[28] Throughout his years spent in voluntary exile in Italy and Germany, Ibsen

[24] Bourdieu, "Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées."
[25] Even-Zohar, *Papers in Culture Research*, 60.
[26] Georg Brandes, *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de aarhundredes litteratur* (Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendal, 1872), 10, 13.
[27] This is true also for the avant-gardes of the center. See Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Nul n'est prophète en son pays? L'internationalisation de la peinture des avant-gardes parisiennes, 1855–1914* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay/Éd. Nicolas Chaudun, 2009).
[28] The point has been emphasized by Narve Fulsås, see "Ibsen, Europa og det moderne gjennombrotet."

remained an essentially Norwegian writer taking part in a Scandinavian "modern breakthrough." Strindberg was, as mentioned, taking part in a Swedish debate from Paris. And the position of the Finnish philosopher Rolf Lagerborg, whose dissertation was rejected on moral-political grounds at the University of Helsinki in 1900, was decisively strengthened at home when he received the mention *très honorable* for a French version of the same dissertation at the Sorbonne three years later.[29]

Acknowledging backwardness, being cosmopolitan at home, and seeking recognition abroad are examples of how asymmetry has been instrumentalized by the contenders in non-dominant cultural fields. As modernity was perceived to be "elsewhere," breaking with national narrow-mindedness was seen as a necessity among liberal progressives, cultural avant-gardes, and radical intellectuals, the latter stressing their position as "autonomous" intellectuals by taking part in national debates from a distance. Pilgrimages to European cultural capitals, voluntary exile abroad, and positioning oneself as a member of a transnational intellectual republic served the purpose of associating oneself with "advanced modernity" and acquiring a broader perspective on national questions. Typically, however, all of this was taking place within an essentially national or at least Nordic intellectual space that remained primary for the Nordic writers, artists, and scientists in, for example, turn of the twentieth-century Berlin and Paris.[30]

Acting in Two Fields Simultaneously (the Local and the International)

There were substantial profits to be gained from recognition in the cultural capitals, but peripheral actors struggled to gain access to these centers. Language was the most obvious of the difficulties facing writers and intellectuals from minor language regions. Other obstacles were related to the difficulty of translating a position acquired in one intellectual field to another, the fluctuating values and expectations of national cultures, and the hierarchical relations between cultures. Intellectuals from the peripheries had to be creative in dealing with these obstacles. They could become devoted disciples of some internationally renowned figure or school of thought, or they could position themselves as sober and skeptical outsiders; they could try to become naturalized and learn how to behave as natives, aiming to participate in the core discussions on equal terms; or they could surrender to the prejudices of the centers, and take on the role of curious foreign specimens and

[29] One of the jury members was Émile Durkheim. See Marja Jalava, *Minä ja maailmanhenki: Moderni subjekti kristillis-idealistisessa kansallisajattelussa ja Rolf Lagerborgin kulttuuriradikalismissa n. 1880–1914* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2005).
[30] For the latter, see Sylvain Briens, *Paris: Laboratoire de la littérature scandinave moderne 1880–1905* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

caricatured representatives of their homeland. Sometimes, access to the core required adapting to commercial interests: for Ibsen this meant being forced to write an alternative "happy ending" for *A Doll's House* (1879) for the first productions of *Nora oder Ein Puppenheim* in Germany.[31]

The cultural anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, writing on the local dimensions of cosmopolitan trajectories, has proposed a formula that may serve to describe the reward of symbolic capital for intellectuals from the peripheries: surrender abroad is mastery at home.[32] The already mentioned example of Strindberg in Paris is illuminating. After causing various scandals at home, Strindberg began a period of exile in the 1880s, during which he was determined to become recognized in Paris. He tried to give his work a French aspect by making significant adjustments to his texts for a French audience, including material considerations such as choosing an arrangement of type, layout, and paper that he considered typically French.[33] It was probably important for him to succeed as a "French writer," not only in order to penetrate the increasingly xenophobic cultural scene in Paris at the time,[34] but also to gain valuable symbolic capital that he could mobilize within the Swedish context.

From their self-consciously peripheral viewpoint, cosmopolitan Nordic intellectuals both struggled with and made use of the limits and possibilities of international intellectual life at the turn of the twentieth century. Like intellectuals in other periods, they saw themselves as a genuinely transnational category, and in the local debates of their respective Nordic peripheries they drew on the symbolic value associated with a transnational republic of letters. In international arenas they were, by contrast, confronted with a tendency to identify each participant, cosmopolitan or not, as a representative of his or her nation. Neiglick, who at home in Helsinki repeatedly emphasized the poor state of intellectual life in his native country, gladly acted as a cultural ambassador abroad when representing Finland at an international student meeting in Paris in the late 1880s.[35] Individual actors thus shifted between different, even contrary, roles. There simply was no space beyond nationality, as was evident already in Goethe's famous vision of a "world literature," understood as a conversation between nations.[36] A similar point was made by Brandes in an essay on world literature (1899) in which he also highlighted the importance of language. According to him,

[31] Egil Törnqvist, *Ibsen: A Doll's House* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41–42.
[32] Ulf Hannerz, "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (1990): 237–51.
[33] The latter concerns Strindberg's self-translation of *Fadren* / *Le Père*. See Giuliano D'Amico, "The Father in Strindberg's French Self-Translation," *Edda* 97 (2010).
[34] See, e.g., Wilfert, "Cosmopolis et l'homme invisibile."
[35] Werner Söderhjelm, *Karl August Tavaststjerna: En levnadsteckning: Senare delen* (Helsingfors: Schildts, 1924), 161; Olof Mustelin, *Euterpe: Tidskriften och kretsen kring den* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1966), 235–39.
[36] Christopher Prendergast, "The World Republic of Letters," in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 3–4.

mediocre writers from dominant linguistic spheres had a much higher chance of international success than first-rate writers from second-rate linguistic regions.[37]

Intellectuals from small-country peripheries thus operated within double frames. Searching for a balance between their commitments in the national field and their allegiance to a cosmopolitan community, they were under no illusion that the relationship between larger and smaller, or more and less central units in this community was symmetrical. But they could mobilize recognition abroad, as well as the interplay between mutually constitutive national and international spaces, in local debates and meritocratic struggles.

III. The Provincialism of the Province and the Provincialism of the Core

The (Dis-)advantages of Backwardness

It is sometimes assumed that scientific or intellectual specialization and progress is only possible in an environment where the number of intellectuals working in a particular field is sufficiently large. "It is only here," Rolf Lagerborg writes from Paris in 1895, "that I in my own discipline can find a trench to plough that is mine and only mine." According to Lagerborg, Finland, as a small country, suffered from the lack of a critical mass and from the national imperative to which every field of culture and science was subjected.[38]

Cultural nationalism included an element of catching up in terms of accumulating symbolic capital from abroad. In small nations, this process resulted in a bland eclecticism, as noted in the early years of the twentieth century by the writer Eino Leino in Helsinki, as well as by Franz Kafka in Prague. While making room "for the Gods of all people and all times" (Leino) was a way to compensate for the lack of strong national models, these minor literatures (Kafka) risked being too heavily influenced by the fashionable writers of the moment, either through the introduction of new works of foreign literature or imitations of the foreign literature that had already been introduced.[39] Roberto Schwartz provides another reflection on the predicament of peripheral intellectual life in his work on Brazilian culture, as seen from a center–periphery perspective and in terms of the relationship between imitation and innovation. Writing about the eagerness of Brazilian academic

[37] Reprinted in Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008).
[38] Rolf Lagerborg, *I egna ögon – och andras* (Helsingfors: Söderströms, 1942), 192.
[39] Eino Leino, "Litterär konservatism", *Euterpe*, no. 8, 1904; Stanley Corngold, "Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature" in Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature*, 282–83; Pascale Casanova, "La Guerre de l'ancienneté," *Des littératures combatives*, 28–29.

intellectuals to adopt new schools of thought from Europe or America, Schwartz notes that "[t]he thirst for terminological and doctrinal novelty prevails over the labor of extending knowledge and is another illustration of the imitative nature of our cultural life."[40]

But the inclination to look abroad does not mean that the peripheries are unexciting places. On the contrary, many have called attention to the more positive implications of the reflexive and inherently comparative mindset typical of the peripheries. In the context of industrial modernization, Thorstein Veblen, in his *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (1915), pointed to the relative ease by which latecomers such as Germany and Japan approached the frontiers of development, in comparison with the pioneer countries of the industrial revolution.[41] In *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (1962) the economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron, referring to differences in the speed and character of industrialization between pioneers and latecomers, made a similar point about the "advantages of backwardness." By way of analogy the same observation can be extended to the intellectual sphere, where it appears that the more consciously peripheral a cultural field is, the easier it is for its members to adapt to changing sets of rules and norms. Adaptability and flexibility are necessities in a culture that constantly looks abroad. Nordic intellectuals were certainly quick to learn the languages and rules of France and Germany in the long nineteenth century. They adapted equally smoothly to the rising dominance of the Anglo-American cultural sphere in the period between 1930 and 1950.

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Historical reflexivity and the "advantages of backwardness" can thus be understood as the practice of, and willingness to, learn from the mistakes of regions that are conceived of as being more advanced, and in this way to anticipate social and intellectual developments.[42] Whereas nineteenth-century Finnish legislators could propose measures for dealing with, for example, unwanted effects of industrialization before these became real problems in Finland, in the politico-intellectual context the analogous move would be to disarm and neutralize unwanted or potentially dangerous concepts and movements before they were introduced to the periphery. In early twentieth-century philosophical debate, when Eino Kaila introduced logical empiricism to the

[40] Roberto Schwartz, "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," *New Left Review* (January–February 1988): 82; Palti, "The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited," 164–65.
[41] See Terutomo Ozawa, "Veblen's Theories of 'Latecomer Advantage' and 'The Machine Process,'" *Journal of Economic Issues* 38 (2004): 379–88. For Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development, see chapter 1 in *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1930).
[42] Pauli Kettunen, *Globalisaatio ja kansallinen me – kansallisen katseen historiallinen kritiikki* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2008). See also Kettunen, "The Power of International Comparison: A Perspective on the Making and Challenging of the Nordic Welfare State," in *The Nordic Model of Welfare: A Historical Reappraisal*, ed. Niels Finn Christiansen, Klaus Petersen, Nils Edlung, and Per Haave (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006). For a comparative perspective on triumphalist versions of backwardness in early twentieth-century Brazilian culture, see Roberto Schwartz, "Brazilian Culture."

nationalist academic and intellectual elite in Finland in the 1930s, he stripped it of its radical leftist political message.[43]

Double Consciousness and the Innovative Potential of Eclecticism

In countries such as Finland and Norway, where the national principle and the notion that everything good comes from abroad often existed side by side, it was a merit to be the pupil of a "great European intellectual". In more universal cultures, such as that of the English, or even the Swedish, this kind of dependence was met with greater suspicion. When logical positivism was introduced to Finland and Norway in the 1930s, it was celebrated as a foreign innovation by Eino Kaila and Arne Næss, respectively. But when the same philosophy was introduced in England and Sweden, it was instead re-described as a continuation of, or parallel to, local traditions. Hence Alfred J. Ayer, on the very first page of his epochal *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), described logical positivism as "the logical outcome" of British empiricism,[44] while the Swedish philosopher Ingemar Hedenius used a series of rhetorical moves to tie it to the local Uppsala philosophical tradition of Axel Hägerström.[45]

The universalism of the cores can indeed lead to a peculiar form of provincialism. One indication of this is the reluctance to distinguish between national and international discussions.[46] In Sweden, arguably the most universal Nordic country, it was possible until at least the 1950s or 1960s to publish ambitious philosophical texts in the national language. In Finland or Norway, by contrast, philosophers tended to make a clear distinction between their professional philosophical production in German, French, or English, and their more popular writings published in Finnish, Swedish, or Norwegian. Discussing the establishment of a Nordic philosophical journal with a Swedish colleague, Kaila strongly argued that there was no point whatsoever to a proper scientific journal being published in languages other than German, English, or French.[47]

If the intellectuals in the cores were more likely to universalize local discussions, the peripheral position offered a comparative perspective that made a universalistic view almost

[43] Malte Gasche and Johan Strang, "Der Kriegsinsatz des finnischen Philosophern Eino Kaila," in *Finnland und Deutschland: Studien zur Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Bernd Wegner, Oliver von Wrochem, and Daniel Schümmer (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2009), 90–91. See also Henrik Stenius, "Nordic Associational Life in a European and Inter-Nordic Perspective," in *Nordic Associations in a European Perspective*, ed. Risto Alapuro and Henrik Stenius (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 35.
[44] Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), 31.
[45] Johan Strang, "The Rhetoric of Analytic Philosophy: The Making of the Analytic Hegemony in Swedish 20th-Century Philosophy," *Redescriptions* 16 (2013): 11–38.
[46] See, e.g., Veronica Stolte-Heiskanen, *Science Policy Studies from a Small Country Perspective* (Helsinki: Suomen Akatemia, 1987), 190.
[47] Strang, "*Theoria* and Logical Empiricism," 72.

impossible.[48] From a postcolonial viewpoint, Walter Mignolo has drawn attention to the innovative nature of "border thinking," that is, the knowledge attained from the exterior borders of the modern world system. And Benedict Anderson has, in exploring the comparative nature of nationalism, emphasized the multiple vision and double-consciousness that results from moving back and forth; the hero in José Rizal's *Noli me tangere* (1887), having returned to Manila from Europe, sees simultaneously from close up and from afar.[49] For Anderson, nationalism depends on such comparisons, and intellectuals in exile are often the ones making them. The perspective is also important for postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said: "Yet when I say 'exile' I do not mean something sad or deprived. On the contrary belonging, as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide, enables you to understand them more easily." [50] Such a double vision was at the heart of Georg Brandes's comparative project on European literatures, as stated in the opening pages of the book series begun in 1872: "The comparative view possesses the double advantage of bringing foreign literature so near to us that we can assimilate it, and of removing our own until we are enabled to see it in its true perspective."[51]

Insofar as there is an innovative potential in the comparative eclecticism of the periphery, it can perhaps be described in terms of a "reflexive consciousness" that follows from operating with multiple frames of reference simultaneously. In her account of world literature as a competitive field, Pascale Casanova notes that writers from the outside tend to be especially open to the latest inventions of international literature, but also particularly perceptive of structures of domination and aware of the obstacles involved in introducing aesthetic innovations internationally.[52] Similarly, Henrik Stenius has stressed the extent to which peripheries are "translation cultures."[53] Constantly following foreign discussions and relating them to domestic developments, small-country intellectuals are wedged in a continuous process of translation and appropriation. This activity, Stenius argues, makes them less prone to fall into universalistic modes of thinking, into believing that concepts, ideas, and theories have a universal meaning. Indeed, in a periphery it is arguably easier to recognize the fact that there are different centers and different universalisms. While it is possible to ignore Frankfurt in Cambridge and Cambridge in Frankfurt, both centers, both discourses, are readily present in Helsinki.

[48] An argument that we develop in "Conceptual Universalization and the Role of the Peripheries", *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, vol. 12 (2017), no. 1, 55–75.
[49] Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (London: Verso, 1998); Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.
[50] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), xxvii.
[51] Georg Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, 1: vii.
[52] Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, 73–74.
[53] Stenius, "The Finnish Citizen," 176.

In Finland after the mid-nineteenth century, when Finnish became an administrative language alongside Swedish and Russian, a national political culture was formed by creatively appropriating key political concepts from other languages. This process makes manifest the notion of the peripheries as "translation cultures." Positions were established and defended on the basis of an awareness of competing roads to political modernization, which needed to be weighed against one another in the interest of finding a solution that harmonized with the local culture and the specific agendas of the actors involved.[54] Not being forced into a particular language, discourse, or school, intellectuals freely borrowed from different strands of international discussions, thus making peripheries a fruitful soil for thinking beyond conventional boundaries.

In the history of the Nordic countries, we can easily find examples of such "innovative eclectics." In the Danish context, Brandes and his co-national Høffding, who made careers as popularizers and networkers of late nineteenth-century European philosophy and literature, remind us of the instrumental role played by small-country intellectuals—especially those from "semi-peripheral" regions—as mediators in the European cultural space. Brandes deliberately brought together philosophical currents in the centers that had been unaware of each other. In his memoirs, he mentions that he was surprised to find out that J.S. Mill, whom he admired greatly, had not read a line of Hegel, either in the original or in translation, and regarded Hegelian philosophy as sterile and empty sophistry. "I mentally confronted this with the opinion of the man at the Copenhagen University who knew the history of philosophy best, my teacher, Hans Brøchner, who knew, so to speak, nothing of contemporary English and French philosophy, and did not think them worth studying. I came to the conclusion that here was a task for one who understood the thinkers of the two directions, who did not mutually understand one another."[55]

In the same way, during the latter half of the twentieth century, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss and the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright made widely recognized attempts to bridge the gulf between analytic and continental approaches to doing philosophy, which played a fundamental role in the political geography of Western philosophy. Already in the mid-1960s, Næss had written a popular book in which he analyzed and compared Rudolf Carnap and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the main icons of the analytic movement, with Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.[56] Similarly, in 1971, von Wright gained international repute for his combination of philosophical analysis and hermeneutics in his book *Explanation and Understanding*.[57] Both von

[54] Matti Hyvärinen et al., eds., *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2003).
[55] Georg Brandes, *Reminiscences of My Childhood and Youth* (New York: Duffield, 1906), 276–77.
[56] Arne Næss, *Moderne filosoffer – Carnap, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre* (København: Vintens forlag, 1965).
[57] Georg Henrik von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

Wright and Næss succeeded in establishing a culture of eclecticism in Helsinki and Oslo, and many of their pupils (Jaakko Hintikka, Dagfinn Føllesdal) continued broaching the conventional borders between analytic and continental philosophy.

Yet it is also important to recognize that both Næss and von Wright made these eclectic innovations at a point when they had already established themselves internationally, by positioning themselves, from the late 1930s on, as rather doctrinarian logical positivists and analytic philosophers. In this respect Pascale Casanova undoubtedly has a point in claiming that intellectual innovations from the periphery have to be "consecrated" in a center before they can be recognized internationally.[58]

Conclusion

By exploring the strategies and actions of intellectuals from the Northern periphery of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the aim of this chapter has been to make a case for recognizing asymmetries and hierarchies in transnational intellectual history. Our central claim is that the emphasis on hybridity, entanglement, and reciprocity that has dominated recent discussion on transnational history should be complemented with an acknowledgment of center–periphery tensions and the asymmetrical nature of transnational cultural interaction. Neiglick, our opening example, was not primarily engaged in a reciprocal exchange of ideas between his home country and the scientific and cultural centers of Europe, and neither were any of the other Nordic intellectuals we have discussed. Instead, their explicit aim was to transfer innovations from what they perceived to be the core to their native and backward peripheries.

Acknowledging asymmetries does not, however, imply that the peripheries are passive. On the contrary, it is only by recognizing the existence of hierarchies that we give justice to intellectuals from the peripheries, to the predicament of their marginal position, and, not least, to their original contribution to the international, European, or global intellectual discussion. Our point has neither been to argue for a rigid center–periphery perspective on intellectual exchange, nor to celebrate the paradoxical advantages of peripheral underdevelopment, but rather to encourage further reflection upon asymmetries in intellectual life. Staying true to the model has never been the main concern, not even in the peripheries. Cultural interaction is rather about seeing what works in a specific context and, from the point of view of individual intellectuals, establishing positions by taking shortcuts to modernity and making the notion that the peripheries lag behind the centers in temporal development part of their individual "strategies."

[58] Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, 47–61.

Acknowledging asymmetries means paying attention to the instrumental use that peripheral intellectuals make of the center–periphery dichotomy when they seek to advance their own position nationally. But it also means recognizing the obstacles that intellectuals from the margins have had to deal with when approaching the centers. Aside from Ibsen, Brandes, Strindberg, Høffding, Neiglick, and, more recently, Arne Næss and Georg Henrik von Wright, not many have achieved international recognition. Those who did succeeded partly as a result of their function as networkers (Brandes, Høffding), as mediators between different intellectual traditions (Næss, von Wright), or, in the case of writers, by finding the right balance between national topics and modern form to appeal to audiences abroad (Ibsen, Strindberg). What unites them is that they succeeded in playing the international card in the national context, and in taking advantage of the peripheral point of view on the international scene—some by accepting the rules of the center, others by acting as bridge builders between different schools in the center, highlighting the "provincial universalism of the core." They all exemplify the asymmetries involved in cultural transfers and the ways in which nationality and internationality are entangled.

Small-country intellectuals like Neiglick were painfully conscious of the role played by transfer, translation, and appropriation in their own intellectual fields, as well as of the hierarchies involved in these processes. The study of the predicaments of intellectual life in the European peripheries can therefore be of crucial significance to the way we think of entanglement in transnational history. While it is self-evident that all cultures are hybrids, intellectual historians need to look more closely at the ways in which they are hybridized and at variations in the logic that determines how local realities interact with universalizing discourses.

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